

Harmon Pumpelly House
(also known as Pumpelly-Parker House)
113 Front Street
Owego
Tioga County
New York

HABS No. NY-5460

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HARMON PUMPELLY HOUSE
(also known as PUMPELLY-PARKER HOUSE)

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Location: 113 Front Street, Owego, Tioga County, New York

Present Owner: Mrs. John M. Parker

Present Occupant: Mrs. Catharine Pumpelly Parker Evans and her three sons (William Dale Evans, Jr., David Parker Evans, and Christopher John Evans)

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement of Significance: A large Greek Revival house with one of the few remaining authentic antebellum gardens, showing pattern of 1830 period, in New York State.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

September 1829 - Land purchased by Harmon Pumpelly from the estate of Nathan H. Camp. The lot originally extended from Front Street to Main Street, but portions on the north and northwest sides have been sold at various times.

c. 1830 - Main rectangular part of the house was built and occupied by Harmon and Delphine Drake Pumpelly (died February 1839).

April 2, 1839 - House sold by Harmon to his brother, Charles Pumpelly. Occupied by Charles and his wife, Frances Avery, and their four remaining unmarried daughters, Harriet (1815-1876), Stella (1817-1894), Caroline (1820-1901), and Lydia (1827-1874).

January 1854 - Charles Pumpelly died and his four daughters inherited the house. Another daughter, Catharine Anne, had married the Hon. John Mason Parker (1805-1873) (Member of Congress 1855 to 1859) in September 1835. Catharine Anne died in 1845 and Parker married her sister, Stella Pumpelly, in March 1854. They, plus two sons by his former marriage, Charles E. and Francis H., moved into the house with the three sisters.

- August 1865 - Stella Pumpelly Parker acquired the property by quit claim from Harriet Pumpelly Frelingysen, Caroline Pumpelly, and Lydia Pumpelly Forsyth.
- 1894 - James Forsyth, nephew of Mrs. J. M. (Stella) Parker, inherited a life interest in the house, after which title was to pass to John Mason Parker, II.
- 1912 - John Mason Parker, II, son of Francis H. Parker, bought out James Forsyth's remaining life interest and moved his family into the house. John Mason Parker, II, died in 1960 and the house is now occupied by his granddaughter and three great-grandsons.
2. Date of erection: 1830.
 3. Architect: Not known.
 4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Not known.
 5. Original plan and construction: The house originally probably consisted only of the main section, without a wing on the west and without the existing rear eight-foot extension of the dining room. The brick house was designed as a two-story rectangular block with an Ionic tetrastyle portico with pediment on the front elevation. The house originally stood in a formal landscape with a miniature Renaissance garden laid out in the rear.

Examination of the present house has revealed where changes have occurred. In the cellar, the three windows on the north wall are identical and are regarded as original windows opening outdoors into an areaway that probably had a porch above it. Also in this north wall is an exterior door, presumably original, that now opens into a small vestibule in the areaway. The large door in the west cellar wall next to the fireplace probably is an original outside door. It is wider than the interior doors and has narrow sidelight windows. The stonework around it shows no interruptions such as would result from breaking through a solid wall for a later door. Its woodwork is like that of the exterior door near the middle of the north cellar wall. Doubtless the west door gave access through an entry way below ground level.

The door on the first floor near the head of the cellar stairs that presently lead from the main house into the west wing, is also probably an original feature. Its woodwork is like that of the larger door directly below

it in the cellar. If this is so, it also was an exterior door and must have had an entry porch with steps on the west side of the house, over an areaway serving the door below. This, however, is speculative.

The west exterior wall of the house must not have had any windows except those in the hall at the foot of the stairway and the side window in the front hall bedroom. Conceivably, false windows like the ones on the east side, second floor front and rear, may have been installed for symmetry.

The arrangement of rooms on the basement floor is uncertain. It seems likely that there were two large rooms along the east side; a fireplace now bricked up may be seen in the rear portion but there was none in the front room. The west half of the cellar apparently was undivided; lath and plaster marks may be seen on every joist from front to rear, leaving no space for a cross partition. The rear part near the fireplace and oven was used as kitchen and the front part as dining room. J. M. Parker, II, said that the dining room was originally in the basement.

On the main (first) floor, the hall and two living rooms seem to remain essentially unchanged except for installation of heating pipes and electric wiring. The parquet flooring in the hall is old and might be original. The original flooring throughout is likely to have been wide board, soft wood (pine?), like that on the second and third floors.

The second floor is unchanged except for the door from the hall into the front bathroom (in the wing) and the door from the back bedroom-living room into the back bathroom. Both of these openings probably were absent in the original house, though the rear one might have been a window.

Whether rooms were partitioned off on the third floor at the time the house was built is not certainly known. The timbering exposed in the closets under the eaves is all alike and the flooring is the same as that on the second floor. These rooms are believed to be original.

Under the eaves at the northwest corner of the house is a small, low-ceilinged room that is reputed to have been a smoke closet for curing meat. Its floor is

brick, the walls and ceiling are plaster, and the inside of the small door is sheathed with sheet metal. Several large hooks are set in the ceiling. A chimney extends through the room on the west wall but there appears to have been no opening into it. The danger of fire and the nuisance of escaping smoke suggest that this closet may have been used to store cured meat rather than to preserve it. The brick floor would deter pests.

The front gable (pediment) has a half-elliptical, fan window originally filled with a leaded glass window similar to that above the front door. The earlier window had been preserved and was installed in the front of the barn during renovations in the 1920's.

A patch of old wood shingles still remains on the part of the main roof that is now covered by the existing wing; they may be seen in the attic of the wing. A strip of outside west wall is also visible in the attic of the wing. This shows white paint on red brick, apparently only a single coat. Whether the house was originally painted white or was unpainted is not known. The 1866 photographs show the brick walls and the woodwork to be the same, apparently white.

6. Alterations and additions: About 1840, Charles Pumpelly added a one-story wing on the west side of the house. Nothing is known about the interior arrangement of this wing, which is visible in a photograph of the house taken in 1866.

Some time after 1866 and probably before 1873 when J. M. Parker died, the wing was replaced by a two-story structure. This second wing was in bad condition by 1913 (when it was replaced) and hence probably had been built thirty or forty years earlier. It is believed that this wing was of wooden construction. The walls of the wing and of the main house appear to be painted yellow in photographs taken in the early 1900's. The photographs show this wing to have been in two parts. The portion next to the old house was about eight feet wide, extending up nearly as high as the eaves of the old structure, and had a flat roof. The front wall was about two feet farther back than that of the present wing. It had one window on each floor, including basement. The outer, more westerly part of the wing was about twelve feet wide, and it had two windows on each floor. Its flat

roof was two or three feet lower than the roof of the inner part. The first floor windows in the wing were all at the same level but about two feet lower than those of the main house. The second floor window in the portion of the wing adjacent to the main house was about one foot lower than those in the old building, while the windows in the outer part of the wing were an additional three feet lower. Thus, the first floor in the wing may have been a little lower than in the main house, and the second floor in the outer part of the wing was certainly substantially lower than in the old house. This wing extended back (north) some six to eight feet farther than the present wing does, at least on the main floor. A small entry porch on the west side had steps down to the west.

This wing was entered from the old house on the main floor by the door near the head of the cellar stairs and by a door near the rear of the dining room in the part added to this room. This connection supports the view that the dining room was extended at this time. This latter door still exists though at present it opens into a narrow closet which has an exterior door opening into space. On the second floor the wing was entered from the landing between the second and third floors by a short flight of stairs. This opening in the west wall was closed in 1913. The wing was also entered on the second floor by a door (still existing) from the rear of the back bedroom-living room. The wing contained the kitchen on the main floor in front, with pantries and storage closets to the rear, and on the second floor a bathroom, two or perhaps three bedrooms, and a narrow room in front for flowers.

The extension of the dining room most likely belongs to this period, 1866-1873, though no positive documentation is known. Several observations clearly indicate that the rear eight feet of the present dining room were added to the original house. This portion projects beyond the rest of the rear wall of the house. The foundation and cellar walls of this part are different; they are of rougher stone below ground level and mostly of brick above. The west side of this projection is flush with the west wall of the main structure but the brickwork is not interlocked continuously along this joint but only at irregular intervals. Above the north windows in this extension the masonry consists of regular brick flat arches; elsewhere in the house above the windows the flat arch is one-and=

a-half bricks high. The exterior brick wall above the first floor is supported by a beam spanning the dining room about eight feet from the rear wall. The outside wall between the two upstairs windows of the back bedroom-living room is a little irregular and the wall appears to be thinner where it joins the wall above the window tops. Some sag may be noted above the window tops. Some sag can also be noted in the upstairs room around the window woodwork. The overall appearance of the house from the rear supports the view that this was an after-thought. The garden porch likewise appears inconsistent with the original design.

Gas illumination and hot air heating systems were put in the main house and wing at some unknown date, perhaps when the wing was built. The gas light company in Owego was organized in 1856.

In 1913 the west wing, which was in poor condition, was completely removed and replaced by the existing brick wing. It was built by Ralph Greene, a general contractor. The wing was designed to conform as much as possible to the style of the original house. The front of this new wing was placed some two feet nearer the street than the earlier wing, in order that a connecting doorway could be opened from the upstairs hall into a front bathroom. The wing extended back just enough to permit access on the second floor from the door in the back bedroom-living room. This width also permitted a connecting door to be opened in the dining room through the closet in the middle of the west wall. The exterior door near the back of the room thus became useless but was retained as access to a projected porch which was never built on the rear of the wing.

Alterations other than repairs and repainting, of various dates, include the following items.

A new steam heating system and electric wiring were installed in 1913 throughout the old and new parts.

A dumb waiter was installed in the cloak closet off the main hall, where pulleys inset in the walls may still be seen. The framing around the former opening in the floor may be seen in the ceiling of the coal cellar. This was used at a time when the kitchen was in the basement but the dining room had been moved upstairs. This probably was not until after Charles Pumpelly's

death in 1854, since he is reputed to have used the present dining room as his bedroom. The kitchen was in the first two-story wing on the main floor, so the dumb waiter preceded this wing, believed to have been built between 1866 and 1873.

The dining room in 1912 had a walnut wainscot about three feet high, painted white, with red burlap wall covering above. This decor was installed in the 1870's or 1880's. The present front door is not consistent with the rest of the woodwork and is probably of similar date. Hardwood floors were put down in the front and back living rooms in the late 1920's and in the dining room prior to 1913.

The dining room windows were converted from three-sash, floor length, to two-sash size, in order to conserve heat, probably in the 1940's. One of the windows at the rear of the back living room was converted to a glassed door in the 1940's, to give more convenient access to the garden porch. The fan-light in the pediment of the portico was replaced prior to 1913 by partly fixed and partly casement sashes.

7. Garden: The garden pattern is shown on the 1853 village map and the main outline of central and lateral axes and cross-axis still exists. Separated from the rear of the house by a lawn, the central axis goes northward 300 feet and terminates at a latticed octagonal garden house of wood painted white. A circular bed is in the center of the intersection of the cross-axis. Measurements are still approximately as on the map, except that rear lots on Main Street have been sold and improved, thus changing the position of the garden house. No significant changes had been made in the garden pattern. There is no boxwood. Peonies are used to outline some hedge positions. The walks, of cinders during the 1920's, are now of turf and the garden is shady.

- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: The Pumpellys were early settlers and extensive land holders, lumber and land being their chief sources of income. Charles Pumpelly was a merchant. The Hon. John Mason Parker was a member of Congress from 1855 to 1859, and was also a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court. His son, Charles E. Parker, was a judge of the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court. His younger son, Francis H. Parker, was a lieutenant colonel in the U. S. Army.

Being a large and rather elegant house, occupied by one of the more prominent families of the community it is naturally associated with the rather distinguished company of personages who lived in Owego in the days before and after the Civil War. These would include the names of Nathaniel P. Willis, the poet; John D. and William Rockefeller; U. S. Senator Thomas C. Platt; General B. F. Tracy; General Isaac S. Catlin; Professor Raphael Pumpelly, Mrs. Belva A. Lockwood, and A. Wordsworth Thompson.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Map of the Village of Owego 1853, in office of B. F. Tracy, Owego, N.Y. (photo-duplicates in files of Broome County Planning Board).
2. Interviews:
Benjamin F. Tracy, Owego, N.Y.
3. Bibliography:

Buchaman, Joan. "Owego Architecture: the Greek Revival in a Pioneer Town." In Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XXV, No. 3 (Oct. 1966). pp. 215-221.

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Kingman, L. W. (ed.). Owego Sketches by Owego Authors. Published Owego, N. Y.: the Baptist Church, 1904. pp. 8, 62, 64, 65.

Kingman, LeRoy. Early Owego. Owego, 1907. p. 163.

Montillon, E. D. Historic Architecture in Broome County, New York and Vicinity. Binghamton, N. Y.: Broome County Planning Department, 1972. p. 100 and 123.

Prepared by Clement G. Bowers, June 1963,
and John Mason Parker, III, 1974.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An example of the Federal-Greek Revival transition. The high rectangular block with a

tetrastyle portico with pediment is combined with Federal details in the doorway, with semi-elliptical fanlight and sidelights, and in the decorative detailing.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: $33\frac{1}{2}'$ (three bay front) x 48', excluding rear addition ($16\frac{1}{2}'$ x 8') and west side wing, $16\frac{1}{2}'$ x 34'.
2. Foundations: Under the original part of the house, native flagstone or "bluestone" (a fine-grained sandstone formerly quarried in many places in southern and eastern New York), in random ashlar pattern, interior side left rough. Under the rear addition, rough slabs of local sandstone and bricks. Under the west wing, concrete.
3. Wall construction: Brick painted yellow.
4. Structural system: Brick bearing walls. Interior walls, heavy wooden beams.
5. Porches, stoops, etc.:
 - a. Wooden two-story Roman Ionic tetrastyle, portico with pediment on southeast, front, elevation. Semi-elliptical fanlight in pediment. Base of columns with double scotia. Steps across full width of house.
 - b. One-story porch on north half of northwest, rear, elevation. Two wooden columns and wooden balusters.
 - c. Wooden stoop with pediment on west side of wing.
6. Chimneys: Four brick chimneys, two inside east wall and two inside west wall, corbelled caps.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors:
 1. Entrance doorway, typical Greek Revival style frontispiece with sidelights set into semi-elliptical arch resting on brick jams stuccoed white to resemble pilasters; entablature below fanlight, supported by Ionic colonnettes.
 2. Door on west side of west wing, 1913.
 3. Door at rear of back living room to back porch.

- b. Windows and shutters: All the sashes, except those in the cellar have six panes (three-over-three); first floor north and south (front and back) are six-over-six-over-six (except for three of them that have been altered), east and west walls of first floor and all second floor windows six-over-six, basement windows have small panes, eight-over-eight. Dark green louvered shutters on all windows.
8. Roof:
- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof over main house with end to street, gable roof over wing at right angles to main house; asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Single cornice with dentils, broad undecorated frieze, architrave of two facias; same cornice in pediment.
- C. Description of Interiors:
1. Floor plans:
- a. First Floor: Side entrance hall, 14' x 23', stairs (two flights and one landing) on west outside wall, doors to front and back living rooms, dining room, and kitchen in wing (this doorway believed to have originally been to the outside). Front living room, 15½' x 17'; opening between front and back living rooms 8'4" wide x 4'4" deep, attached Ionic half columns on either side of opening supporting entablature; rear living room 15½' x 16'; fireplace in each room framed by engaged Tuscan columns, plain black marble entablature, simple mantel shelf; cast-iron panelled pilaster stone insert in front living room fireplace only; applied double moulding forms a stepped band around panels on walls of front living room. Dining room, in west corner, 14' x 12½', fireplace, two closets, doors to hall, to back living room, and to pantry in west wing. West wing, kitchen, 16' x 16½', contains stairs to second floor along east wall, exterior door on west wall, doors to two pantries on north wall, west pantry 7' x 9', east pantry 7' x 9' with door to dining room.
 - b. Second floor: South bedroom 14' x 9'; east bedroom 17' x 15½'; fireplace on east wall, closet, door to north bedroom; north bedroom 17' x 15½', closet, fireplace on east wall; west bedroom 14' x 11', two closets, hole for stove pipe, door to bathroom in west wing; west wing west bedroom 8½' x 9'; west wing center bedroom 11½' x 9'; west wing south

- bath 7' x 9'; enclosed single flight staircase to kitchen; stairs (two flights with one landing) along west wall of main house to attic.
- c. Attic: Central living room; bedroom at south end, fan-window in pediment, door to storage area; bedroom at north end, two windows in end wall; door to storage area; three other storage areas, one under east side of gable roof, one under west side of gable roof, one in northwest corner with brick floor, plaster walls and door sheathed with sheet metal.
 - d. Basement: Single flight enclosed staircase from front hall; doors to three rooms plus one to basement under wing and one to vestibule under dining room extension; fireplace and oven at north end of full length side hall; furnace in northeast corner room; exterior door at east end of portion under dining room extension.
2. Stairway:
 - a. Main stairway: Two flights with one landing; amenity button in newel post; spindle balusters, open-string.
 - b. Stairway in wing: Single flight, enclosed.
 - c. Stairway to basement: Single flight, enclosed.
 - d. Stairway to attic: Two flights with one landing.
 3. Flooring: First floor hall parquetry; remainder of first floor hard wood; second and third floors soft wood (pine?).
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster painted and papered; front living room has applied doubling molding that forms a stepped band around walls.
 5. Doorways and doors: Front door, six panels, fluted pilasters; other interior doors, six panels; doors to west wing in basement and first floor originally outside doors; in opening between front and back living rooms, two doors 4'2" x about 8' panelled.
 6. Decorative features and trim: Interior windows and doors have symmetrically moulded trim with corner blocks with leaf design; floor length windows in living rooms have panelled, folding interior shutters for bottom sashes.
 7. Notable hardware: Iron locks and brass knobs on interior doors.

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8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: Steam heating system installed in 1913.
- b. Lighting: Electric wiring, 1913.

- D. Site and Surroundings: The Harmon Pumpelly House faces southeast and is set back about fifty feet from Front Street (north side); semi-circular driveway to front steps, with entrances at two front corners of lot; driveway branches to east and back to garage on east side of lot about thirty feet back of house. A garage is in front (carriage) half of former barn; three horse stalls razed in 1920's.

Prepared by John Mason Parker, III
Raleigh, North Carolina
March, 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Broome County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historical American Buildings Survey. The historical material was prepared in June, 1963, by Clement G. Bowers of the Broome County Historical Society, and in March, 1974, by John Mason Parker, III, son of the present owner. Photographs were taken by Jack E. Boucher, March 1963. The project was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez, March, 1974.